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A Peony and Iris Enthusiast Abroad

“Musings From The Mediterranean”

(*Garden Notes No. 18*)



SUPPOSE there is no class of men and women in the United States who work harder, and who give more hours per day to their work, than those among us who are giving our time to spreading the knowledge of the beauty of the Peony and the Iris. The blooming season finds me in my garden between four and five o'clock in the morning and I am quite sure that six o'clock has been the average time of the beginning of my working day throughout the entire season.

And so in December when the ground freezes and no more outdoor work can be done, I am glad that no delicate plants in glass houses demand my attention, and that I am free to spend the vacation I have earned in any climate to which my fancy calls me. This year I felt the call to the Mediterranean Countries, and so I sailed for Europe, and remained long enough in France for a visit with M. Millett and M. Cayeux in their gardens near Paris, with the expectation of seeing Vilmorins and the English growers on my return in March or April.

From Marseilles I took a ship for Algiers where I joined the party of Dr. Allen (Bureau of University Travel) for a trip through Algeria and Tunisia. With the aid of automobiles and railroads we had a most delightful trip going as far south as the Sahara Desert, visiting the Oasis of Biskra with its "Garden of Allah," and the Oasis of Sidi-Okba with its very ancient mosque dedicated to the memory of the Mohammedan Conqueror who by the sword transformed Christian North Africa into a fanatical Mohammedan province.

Two of the enjoyable experiences in the desert were rides upon camels (not too long rides, of course) and the sight of a splendid mirage which showed a great lake surrounded by trees, when in reality only sand hills existed.

I confess I would like to tell you of our trip to the resurrected old Roman city of Timgad, more interesting in some respects than Pompeii, to the old Roman camp of Lambesse with its four sided Triumphal Arch, to the city of Constantine, which in Cæsar's time was known as Citra, and which has seen nearly as much war and conquest as Jerusalem, to Hammam-Mesqoutine (The Bath of the Damned) to Tunis with its splendid bazaars, better and more oriental in my judgment than those of Cairo and Constantinople, to Kairouan, one hundred miles south of Tunis with the largest mosque in North Africa built many centuries ago from the ruins of the old city of Carthage, of whose remains in its original location we could see hardly a trace. I am sorry I cannot convey to you the pleasure of a trip among the Arabs and Berbers of North Africa, but I am glad to recommend to you "The Bureau of University Travel," for this organization certainly understands how to bring the American tourist into pleasant contact with a civilization altogether different from his own.

February found me in Sicily traveling upon my own resources, and in that delightful land of volcanoes and earthquakes I enjoyed visits to old Greek temples and theaters built many centuries before Rome ruled the world.

Now I am on board the Italian Steamship "Esperia" bound for Egypt, where I hope to again see its pyramids, temples and tombs, many of which were built centuries before Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea on their way into the Promised Land.

But now, with a few quiet days on the Mediterranean Sea ahead of me, I again feel my interest in gardens. About fifteen years ago, while living in the open, endeavoring to recover my health from one of those breakdowns which are so common among American business men, I first became interested in gardens through my observation of a magnificent plant of the now famous Peony "Jubilee." My first two booklets, "Peonies a Merchant's Hobby" and "Jubilee at the Reading Peony Show," have familiarized the readers of my Garden Notes with the victories Jubilee has won at our National Peony exhibitions. During the past five years I have sold many hundreds of plants of this variety,

so that it is now growing in every state in which Peonies thrive. As many of these plants are now three and four years old, producing the best specimen bloom to be seen anywhere, their owners should have no hesitancy in showing Jubilee in any contest in which they have an opportunity to make an exhibit.*

Jubilee has one very serious fault; its stems are not strong enough to hold its enormous blooms erect in the garden. But this defect does not in the least detract from its beauty in the show room, for it usually displays far more grace than do the very stiff stemmed varieties. I sincerely hope that Jubilee will be exhibited at every Peony Show in the country this year.

The blooms of Le Cygne have better stems, and as a garden plant this variety is far superior to Jubilee, but the two varieties meet upon an equal footing in the show room. When fully opened both varieties are pure white, but Jubilee often develops from a delicate pink bud and shows a golden glow at its center when it first unfolds its petals.

Every Peony enthusiast should carefully study all the varieties in his own garden, and he should exhibit his best varieties at every opportunity, for it is only by this method that the flower lovers of America will learn how beautiful the newly developed Peonies really are. When shows are held very late in the season, it is of course necessary to use altogether different varieties to show the Peony at its best.

Enchanteresse, Grandiflora, Milton Hill, Elwood Pleas, Sarah Bernhardt, and Solange are late season varieties and all of them have won fame at former Peony Shows. During the last three years the new variety, Nina Secor, has attracted a great deal of attention. It is a late season variety, and at the Des Moines show last year, Mr. Harry Little, the winner of the Gold Medal, called attention to its similarity to the French variety, Enchanteresse. If it should ultimately prove superior to that variety, it would possibly become as famous as is Le Cygne today, but it may take some years to get a proper estimate as to its value in the Peony world.

Philippe Rivoire is still holding its record as the best red variety, although it will not compare in size with Adolphe Rousseau, which was shown in such splendid form at Des Moines last year. It is unfortunate that France has sent to this country a false Philippe Rivoire. It is a Peony of some merit, and when it first opens its petals it is so much like the true variety that even experts visiting my garden failed, upon first glance, to notice the difference. On the second and third days, however, it loses its deep brilliance and even a novice will distinguish the duller tone of color. As both varieties were originated by Benoit Riviere, I have suggested that if the second and inferior variety be kept in commerce, we might appropriately give it the name "Benoit."

* Garden Notes Number Five, containing instructions for growing and preparing Peony bloom for a Peony Show will be mailed free to anyone asking for it.

I do not know to what extent the false Philippe Rivoire is on the market, as I have had only one shipment of it from an American garden.

President Wilson (Thurlow) and Jeannot (Dessert) are two new very excellent late pink varieties which ought to be exhibited at all shows which are held late enough in the season. Both of them have given great promise in former seasons and so all amateurs are naturally anxious to see whether or not these varieties are really worth the prices at which they are being held.

Every community in which Peonies are grown should, if possible, hold a local Peony Show or exhibition in which all varieties available should be shown with their names prominently displayed. I have found the merchants in my home town are very anxious to co-operate and do anything in their power to help give the Peony and the Iris the publicity to which their beauty entitle them, and I feel quite sure that with a little education from the local Peony and Iris enthusiasts, most communities will welcome and financially assist a committee in staging a flower show.

Frequently visitors arrive to see my garden in the hottest part of the day, often traveling fifty or a hundred miles, and the sight of the blooms temporarily wilted by the intense sun, does not make the garden trip the pleasure it really should be. This is one uncomfortable feature which I wish to overcome as nearly as possible, and to this end I have instructed my force to rearrange my offices, during my vacation, so that each variety of Peony and Iris in my collection can be conveniently displayed during its particular blooming season. In a short time visitors can get the effect of mass Peony bloom, and later at their leisure make a close study of all the varieties in a sheltered exhibition room. It is my intention to display each variety in a vase with the name prominently shown.

Visitors are welcome during the entire blooming season, and no effort will be made to induce anyone to make purchases, either of blooms or of roots. If, however, any visitor desires to place an order, he can have the assistance of my secretary or of one of my stenographers.

Naturally I wish to enjoy the garden with my visitors and will be glad to discuss the merits of the different varieties with them, but in order that I may get the full pleasure of the garden, all business affairs will be delegated to the management of my secretary until the blooming season is past.

Steamship "Esperia,"
Mediterranean Sea,
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